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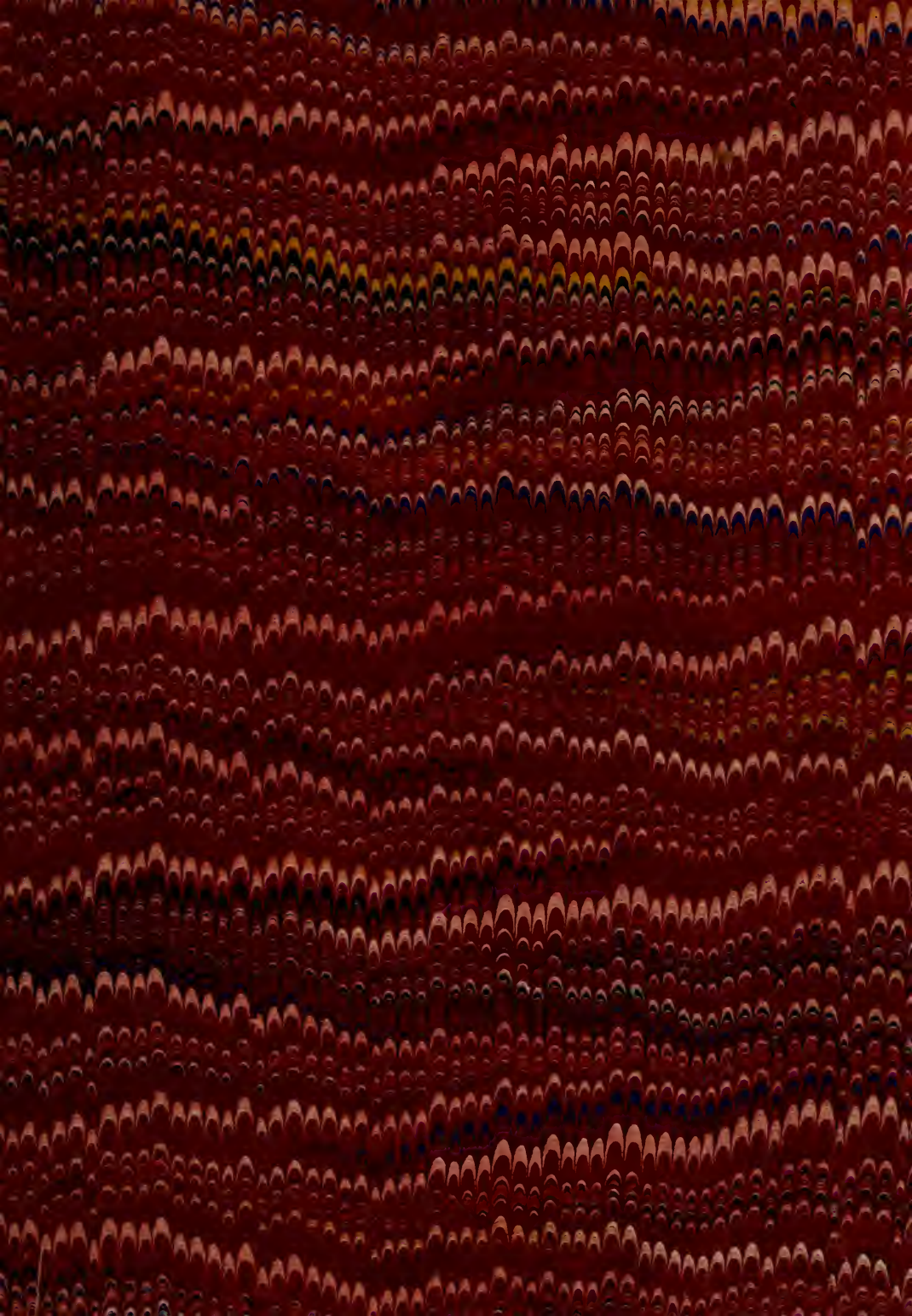
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IDLE HOUR SERIES.

How Two Girls Tried Farming





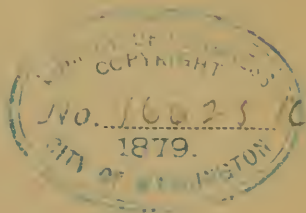
In Prosperous Days.

HOW TWO GIRLS TRIED FARMING.

*[Originally published in the ATLANTIC MONTHLY for
February, 1875; here given with amplifications and
additions.]*

BY

Dorothea Alice Shepherd. pseud. of
Ella (Farman) Pratt



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[1879]


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HOW TWO GIRLS TRIED FARMING.

OROTHEA Alice Shepherd and
Louise Burney v. Fate.

Yes, that was the way the case stood. *We* were making the fight.

I confess that we often wonder now that we dared. But success is always more or less enervating. Our needs gave us requisite intensity then.

I suppose Fate and Folks thought

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we were very well off as we were — Louise as housemaid in a country family where she was “as good as anybody,” and I as district school-teacher; at least, I know that in the first of the struggle the sympathy was all on the wrong side. It is a very fine thing, now that we have succeeded; but there were days and times when — well, never mind! it is little matter since we have succeeded; since we have accomplished nearly everything which they predicted we never could do.

Still, just here I must set it down that no woman ever encouraged us in our various plans for change and better times. The men to whom we talked

smiled weakly and said little — I suppose they considered us hardly worth discouraging. But women actively discouraged us. It was not our fortune to meet any who were essaying independence for the sake of the theory, but only those who were trying to earn a living. Of these, the most experienced and the most courageous, when we confided to them the plan which we finally carried into execution, gravely advised abandonment. Whenever it came to a face-to-face talk with those women who had experimented in business, whom the outside world looked upon as successful, they, every one, confessed to a sort of heartsick weariness. We found not

one who held up her own example and experience for our admiration and hope. We found not one who recommended to us her own way of earning a living.

“It costs all it comes to,” said each and every one.

Those in salaried positions were the cheeriest, wore the fewest care-lines on forehead and cheek.

We found no woman feeling comfortable over an investment of money, excepting in cases where the business was intelligently “kept small,” kept within the limits where the proprietor herself could perform the labor, or nearly all, thus paying out little or none of the profit to

employees. These safe-going persons were continually "taking stock," and balanced their books every Saturday.

We found few speculators; women who dared borrow capital and flaunt a showy business on the strength of a man's instinctive belief that "business *must* brighten soon."

These investigations upset for us many an ideal possibility in "trade."

"Don't invest in fine goods—don't trade on the 'innate love of the beautiful,'" very earnestly said one woman to us, a woman whom we had long observed and envied.

A year later her chromos and portfolios of fine engravings, the water col-

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ors and the art needlework which she had hopefully and helpfully bought from white-handed toilers, the costly illustrated gift-books, the inlaid cabinets and the beautiful carvings which had made her store the loveliest lounging place in the little town, were sold for twenty-five cents on the dollar.

“I keep showy goods, but not fine ones,” said another—one of the half-dozen prosperous tradewomen I know—the proprietor of a fancy goods store. “I buy for the small every day happen-to-needs of the household. The ladies who wear fine crepe lisse and real silk ribbons would hardly buy at my store—no matter how good my wares. It is safer

to keep store for that class of customers who are paid wages every Saturday night."

She is fully persuaded that were she to go into handsome, spacious quarters, and full-stock her counters and shelves after her own æsthetic ideas she would "fail up" before the close of the year.

Said another, more easy, more heartless, more happy-go-lucky than the others, "I am going to sell out—make a change. I have had a good time so far, but I know better than to go on. I should break sooner or later!"

Lou and I now know—nay, we hear rather—of women who have succeeded in active business; but at the time of

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our own struggling forth all we could learn of any woman's experiment in independence was depressing.

So, as I said before, I wonder that we dared.

People who have become interested in us since our success say that Lou and I are each the other's complement.

Perhaps. We are wholly unlike, yet agree and lean upon each other.

Ever since we were tiny school-girls we had owned in joint proprietorship many Spanish castles, where we largely lived when together, as neither of us had any other *bona-fide* home. But the time came when, instead of reading and

romancing together, we spent our leisure hours in scolding over our lot. I suppose, indeed, that had we been members of the International, or of a Commune, instead of a pair of harmless Yankee village girls, we could not have discussed the problems of work and property much more fiercely than we did. Only I don't think we ever thought we had a right in other people's property. Even to us two simple girls it would have seemed an absurdity that one should reason he had a right to what another had lawfully gained or inherited.

But we did want a home; we did want to be our own mistresses; we did want some means of living that should

be independent of the caprices, the likes and dislikes, and the varying fortunes of others. And to us this seemed little, something that should be simple of getting, not overmuch to beseech of Fortune, to demand confidently of Fate.

But I am bound to confess that, although we read everything we could find on the subject of Labor, and made constant inquiry relative to every occupation we had known women to undertake, at last, turning from every one of the traditional industries of our sex, finding all those ancient avenues crowded, it was a very long time before we could discuss our own future without, at each interview, going through with a certain

amount of day dreaming — perhaps women do not easily distinguish between planning and wishing. I think Louise believed she was planning whenever she said afresh what she already had said a hundred times :

“ I should prefer something that would take us among books, shouldn't you, Dolly? If we only had money we would begin a little store: books on one side with a nice news counter, and on the other side bottles and drugs. Don't you think so, Dolly, some day? ”

Whereupon Dolly, also for the hundredth time, would remind her of the two ladies, tired-out teachers, who were doing just that; and then she would

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also go on to speak of the amount of debt incurred in addition to the capital invested.

Then becoming practical in her desperation, Louise would resolve she must save up her wages and educate herself as a teacher of mathematics, while I should perfect my French and drawing.

“If I could, don’t you think we might get hired in the same school, Dolly?”

Mathematics! my poor Louise! when there always has been something the matter with her head where figures are concerned. When she sets the basket of eggs in the wagon I always inquire if the “little pencil” is in the pocket-book. It always is, for—careful little

soul — she wouldn't be the one to peril our precious gains by trusting to a mental calculation of eleven dozens at thirteen cents per dozen.

But, finally, when a good plan and capital to carry it out both seemed impossible, Fate relented and both the plan and the capital suddenly "turned up."

A maiden sister of Louise, who as housekeeper had saved up eight hundred dollars, died and left the sum intact "to us," as Louise was pleased to say. And one day soon after, she laid down the *New York Tribune* and said:

"Let *us* go West!"

It was meant as a merry jest; but it was a breeze to blow the tendril of a

hitherto vague fancy of mine round a "happy thought" which I now know many other women have tried to clamber up by.

"Lou, why not?" I exclaimed at once. "Why *not* go West and buy a bit of land and raise small fruits for the markets?"

In a few moments we had talked ourselves brave and eager—not so much over the work as over the happiness—the plan presenting itself to us as idyl, pastoral, holiday, picnic.

"That would be home and independence beyond any of the other plans," said Lou, who, even more than I, hated "the third person." "Just you and I,

and nobody to deal with but Dame Nature!"

I went back to my boarding-place. I read and reflected. Unfortunately, for our project, I had a genius for details and now it came into baleful activity. I stayed away from Louise and made figures on the back of a letter I had in my pocket until there was not a shred of our bright plan left. Friday she sent me a note, and Saturday night I went to her.

She took me up into her room, turned me round, looked me attentively in the face.

"Dolly," said she at last, "what have

you turned down the lights for? Aren't we two girls going out West to raise small fruits; or did I dream it?"

"Lou," I said, "have you any idea how long it takes to bring strawberries into profitable bearing, and raspberries too?"

"I believe strawberries bear in June, and raspberries some time in July—why?" answered she innocently. "I suppose we should set them early in spring."

"Lou Burney, we should have to wait as good as two years!" I cried. "Yes and then, unless we were supernaturally early in market, the bulk of our crops would go at ten cents per quart. I've searched market reports through old papers until I'm perfectly certain the

markets everywhere — *everywhere*, Lou Burney — must be overstocked. I am convinced that it is not safe to stake our interests in such an enterprise. We should have to produce enormous crops to make it a business worth while. And it isn't likely two ignorant girls could do that—at least not at first; and since, meantime, the two ignorant girls must live, they had better beware."

"Oh, Dolly!" Lou gasped at last. "Do you mean to say all our talk the other night has gone for nothing? And you were so sure! How could you?"

"I hope you don't blame me for looking round," I replied, rather crossly. "One of us, at least, should be capable

of that." Indeed, I was as sorely hurt as she, for it was the very first plan over which I had felt any enthusiasm, any hope.

"But you had not the right to be sure, if you were *not* sure," she persisted. "You know how I depend on you, Dolly," she added pathetically, "you *know* that when you say anything is so I *never* inquire into it at all!"

All of which was true.

I could say nothing. She went on regretfully:

"Dolly, I do believe I'd rather we hadn't found out, and gone on, and tried it. It was such a nice plan: you and I with a house of our own—

it was next thing to being birds and living in a nest. Yes, I would rather have tried it, and lived so a while even if we failed at last. Oh, Dolly, can't we after all? It couldn't take much just for you and me—just two girls; how could it?" she went on eagerly, and still more eagerly. "For you know we shouldn't live like a great family—just two girls, Dolly. Those three great regulation meals that always must be prepared in a family—a family you know, where there are men—of course *that* costs. Of course I admit that we couldn't control the cost at all, if we were so situated. But *we* shouldn't be situated so, Dolly—no, thank Heaven,

there is no *man* in our plan with his regularly-recurring hunger! You *know*, Dolly, if you will only think, that half the time we should have just a bowl of bread and milk for dinner! and what would *that* cost?—why, next to nothing. And when we didn't want supper—half the time, Dolly, I don't care for any supper at all—why we'd omit supper entirely—we *could* if there was no man about. Don't you see, Dolly dear, that it *couldn't* cost for two girls like a family, a real family?"

There was something in what Lou said—and still there wasn't. I told her folks averaged about alike in their needs, and what we didn't consume one day,

we must the next, and that I felt sure the cost of food for a household of women would be about the same as for the mixed family.

“Well, then, how much *would* it take, anyhow?” said she, with a little frown between her golden brows. “I don’t credit a word of it that it would cost as much as if we were a real family going to housekeeping. Just think how little I ate for breakfast this very morning—a slice of bread and butter, an egg, a cup of coffee—six cents, may be—three times six are eighteen cents—seven times eighteen cents are seven times eight are fifty-six, and seven times one are seven and five to carry—

well, about a dollar and a quarter—
mercy! how boarding-houses must make
money!”

Here she paused for breath, and I
reminded her that she was probably to
have roast beef for dinner, and would
need and have a steak for the morrow’s
breakfast, and that her figures were not
correct, any way.

“But never mind,” said I, “we will as-
sume that for one day it couldn’t cost
much. Have you any idea what it is
said to cost one person one year?”

“No, Dolly, I haven’t, that I know of.
But you have, I see. I understand that
look; you’re going to bear down on me
now with a column of figures!”

Yes, I was. In my pocket I had a newspaper slip whose figures and statistics might well deter one from waiting for berries to grow. It was a compilation from the Report of some Labor Commission, giving the average cost of living of the individuals of ordinary families:

One hundred and thirty-two dollars and thirty-three cents.

"Two hundred and sixty-four dollars and sixty-six cents!" she exclaimed, after some figuring. "Well, Dolly," she added, with a sigh, "we couldn't live while we waited, if this is correct. The berry plan must be for women who have something to subsist them while they wait; we ought to have something to sell right away."

She took up the slip again, and thoughtfully looked over the items.

“How much the small things cost! those which people who have them never count among the *expenses* of living—milk and eggs and butter and vegetables. I fear I was thinking of only meats and flour, and groceries, as the things that must be bought. To accomplish anything, we ought some way to have all such things without buying, as, of course, farmers’ families do. Dear me, Dolly, we couldn’t for we should have nothing in the world left after we bought any sort of a place, while, of course, we should need to have some money to use right along every day. I fear this

plan will have to go with the rest. I wish we knew how the women who have done such great things with berries managed while they were waiting for their fruit to come into bearing. Nobody ever seems to tell that part of it. ‘Why don’t you say something, Dolly?’” she asked, turning on me suddenly.

“I can’t. Not now. I’m thinking. I’ll come again in three days. Then, I believe — I believe that *perhaps* I shall have plenty to say.”

Lou caught me by both hands.

“You mean things when you look like this, Dolly Shepherd; what is it?”

But I broke away from her, not letting too much hope creep into my smile,

either. Yet, I felt that now I really had seized upon what Castelar calls "the Saving Idea." Remember, I was wholly ignorant then of the fact that here and there a brave, strong-brained woman—many in the aggregate—was doing this same thing successfully. I say strong-brained, because no flippant woman can succeed in the management of a farm. It requires far clearer and steadier foresight than to buy and sell successfully. Only the born woman of affairs may safely adventure in this direction. I have met not one of these women-farmers; but I dare to say they are all good logicians, though perhaps slow in mental movement, whom no sophistry can mis-

lead, who are never to be diverted from the main purpose.

But I would not tell Lou. I meant to dissect this flash. I would study it in detail. Just at present my mind was in confusion with my thoughts all circling round this central idea :

Could we go West and buy a farm, a real farm, a man's farm?

It was a startling thought to me — it might well be to a young woman who never had planted a hill of corn, or hoed a row of potatoes in her life, and who had a hacking cough, and a pain in her side. Still I felt strangely daring, since out-of-door life was of course what I needed physically; and home, and

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freedom from anxiety concerning my daily bread, certainly could not retard the cure. For the first time I could find a certain good in the fact that I was all alone in the world. There was nobody, either for Lou or for me, to interfere with our devoting ourselves to the solution of a problem. If we failed, there was nobody to be sorry or mortified.

Louise did not wait for my mysterious three days to expire. The afternoon of the second she came down to the school-house. It was just after I had "dismissed."

"Now, Miss Dolly Shepherd!" demanded she.

Well, I had gone through the new plan in detail, had thought and thought, read and read, had found there was no sex in brains; for out of the mass of agricultural reading I saw that even I, should I have the strength, could in one way or another reduce whatever was pertinent to practice. I resolutely had cast money-making out of the plan, but I believed we could raise enough for our own needs; and I had thought, "Oh, Lou Burney, if we should be able to establish the fact that women can buy land and make themselves a home, just as men do, what a ministry of hope even our humble lives may become!"

In my earnestness I had tried various absurd little experiments. In my out-of-door strolls I think I had managed to come upon every farming implement upon the place. Out of observation, I had lifted, dragged, turned, flourished, and pounded. I had pronounced most of them as manageable by feminine muscle as the heavy kettles, washing machines, mattresses, and carpets that belong to a woman's indoor work. I had hoed a few stray weeds back of the tool-house, a mullein and a burdock (which throve finely thereafter), and found it as easy as sweeping, and far daintier to do than dinner-dish-washing—and none of it was to



Dolly tests her strength.



be done "over the stove!" To be sure there was the hot sun, but there was also the fresh air.

I felt prepared to talk.

"Well, Lou," I said, "we will try the out-of-doors plan, and very much as we at first talked. We will even have some berries. Only we will from the very first make our daily bread and butter the chief matter, and just do whatever else we can, meanwhile. I don't see, no more than you, how these women who have done so well with fruit-raising managed *whilst*. But this is the way *I* have planned for us for whom there shall be no dreary *whilst*, as we will begin at once:

“We will take our moneys”—I had three hundred of my own—“and go up into the great Northwest and make the best bargain we can for a little farm, which, however, shall be as big as possible, for from the very beginning we must keep a horse and a cow, and a pig, and some hens. Don’t open your eyes so wide, dear—I got it all from you. It is your own idea—I have only put it in practical working order.

“Keeping a cow, you know, will enable us to easily keep the pig; so keeping the cow means smoked ham and sausage for our table, our lard, our milk, our cream and our butter. As you said, we must either have such things, or else

have something to sell right away. There will also be, as I have planned it, butter, eggs, and poultry with which to procure groceries, grains, and sundries. There will also be, in the winter, a surplus of pork to sell. We shall also raise some vegetables. We can also the first year grow corn to keep our animals, and for brown bread for ourselves. We will, among the first things we do, set out an orchard and a grape arbor, make an asparagus bed, and have a row of bee-hives. Meanwhile, having thus secured the means of daily life, I have other and greater plans for a comfortable old age."

These I also disclosed. She made no

comment upon them, but reverted gravely to the animals.

"I should think we might do it all, Dolly, only the horse; do we need a horse? Be sure now, Dolly, for a horse would be a great undertaking. You know we would have to keep a nice one if we kept any, not such a one as women in comic pictures always drive. Be very sure, now, Dolly."

"I am. For we must cultivate our own corn and potatoes. I can see that in small farming, hiring labor would cost all the things would come to, just as business women have told us it is in other work, you know. Besides, how could we ever get to mill, or church, or

store? Only by catching rides; our neighbors would soon hate us."

"And who would drive?" asked Lou.

I paused.

"You would have to, I suppose," I said at last. I felt she could; and I also felt that I couldn't.

Lou nodded.

"Yes, because you will have to be the one to go to the neighbors to borrow things," she said, as if balancing our accounts.

"We shall live within ourselves," said I. "What we don't have we will go without."

Lou said there would be some comfort in that kind of being poor, and

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grew jolly and care-free presently, and said "we would go at once."

Accordingly, we came up into Michigan, to cousin Janet's. Making her hospitable house our head-quarters, we proceeded to "look land" like other Eastern capitalists: that is, cousin Janet's husband took us in his light wagon to see every farm that was for sale within ten miles. And it was such fun—we little midgets to go tripping over magnificent estates of two or three hundred acres, and spying about, with only a thousand dollars in our pockets!

Of course, they might have known we could not buy them; and we did think,

so long as we were "only two girls," that there was no need for such widespread consternation when we finally made our choice. However, Lou and I were of one mind. Cousin Janet and her husband had anxiously shown us various snug little village houses with an acre of ground attached, but we had resolved to keep ourselves to the plan of "mixed farming;" and when the whole of that rubbishy, neglected thirty-five acres was offered to us by its non-resident owner for a sum quite inside our means, instead of turning up our noses at it, we felt it to be a bit of outspoken friendliness on the part of Providence; and to the astonishment of

the neighborhood, instead of "haggling," and "beating down," and innumerable conversations, man fashion, we bought it without delay, at the very first interview.

But, somehow, we have been obliged thus to rely, almost wholly, upon our own judgment from the beginning—so many things which we lack are necessary in order to carry out a man's advice: money, strength, hired men, horses. Still we believe that these very lacks, compelling us as they have to certain close economies and calculations, and to careful studies of first principles, have helped us to our success—a success which has *not* "cost all it come to."

Our scraggy acres were a contrast, to

be sure, to the handsome orchards and wheat fields we had visited, and also to the tolerably well-tilled farms on either side of us. But from the day on which we "drew writings," Lou and I never have looked upon the spot without seeing it, not only as it is, but as what it is to become, and is becoming. Every stone picked up, every fence corner cleared, every piece of thorough plowing, every rod of fence built, every foot of trellis, every rose-bush and grape-vine and shade-tree planted, has been to us as one brush-stroke more upon the fair idyllic picture we saw in the beginning.

On our way home from the village lawyer's we again passed our place.

John, rather maliciously, asked if we would not like to look at it "as a whole." We assured him, with dignity, that we should, and he stopped the team.

"As a whole" it was a narrow, hilly stretch weakly outlined by a skeleton of a fence; a forbidding surface of old stubble ground and wild turf, the distant hill-tops crowned with tall mulleins. There was not a sprig of clover on the place, and though there was an old brown house and barn, there was not an orchard tree, nor a reminiscence of garden.

We sighed, not that our farm was wild and neglected, but that even the outer

aspect told such a black tale of impoverishment and robbery.

Cousin John discoursed again of the poor soil as we sat there. He warned us that we could *never* expect to raise wheat. Wheat! I had seen little save wheat since we came into the State. I didn't believe in so much wheat, on account of certain principles in chemistry, and I told him so; and left him to laugh at my "school-ma'am farming" while I jumped out and crept through the bars, and ran up to make sure the old house was locked. What an old house! It was growing dear to us already, as being our very own: but in reality it was as brown and straggling,

as lonely and unpicturesque, as a last year's nest

— “torn with stones and rain.”

With a strange new sense of security from the ups and downs of life, which only the possession of a bit of real estate can give one, we flitted away to prepare to come again to our own in the spring, with the first robin.

I went back to cousin Janet's and hired out, not to her, but to cousin John; while Louise took up her old business of housework at a wealthy farmer's near us — cheerily, both of us.

We had paid for our farm — and just here I would earnestly advise that no woman undertake what a man often

does—and sometimes successfully—the purchase of a farm on credit, calculating to “make it pay for itself;” for in nine cases out of ten the frequent man’s luck will also be hers—she will have paid in all her capital, and she will slave and stint to “keep up the interest” on the balance of the price-money, she will go on doing so for two, three, or four years, the money she may make all going in that direction, instead of being used for “improvements,” her farm probably becoming impoverished each year, until at last the land returns to its owner on “foreclosure of mortgage,” all her toil and struggling counting for nothing, in company with

the portion of purchase-money paid in at the first; and a woman's courage and a woman's physical strength will hardly renew themselves, as in the man's case, to begin afresh.

Well, as I said, we had paid for our farm, and there remained to us funds for the purchase of horse, wagon, and cow. Lou, being supposed coolest in case of fire, took charge of the precious deed, and of the money, promising to add thereto, before spring, fifty dollars.

"And that," said she sunnily, "will buy your clover seed, Dolly."

"But you know *you* believe in clover, Lou, and the cows and sheep?"

It was something to shoulder alone

the responsibility of my theories since they were to be carried out by the aid of another's earnings.

"O, yes, dear Dolly, if you are certain you do," Lou answered, cheerily.

I really was pretty certain.

Lou had her two dollars each week. What I earned was twelve dollars per month—good cousin John!—much experience, and much health. Of course they wanted to keep me in the house. But at the outset I contrived for myself some shortish dresses—I did not wear *the* short dress as I am constrained to say I ought. A dress, reaching only to the knee, with trousers graceful in the cutting, the whole suit made of strong

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material — tweed, cheviot, jean, linen — is the only sensible and suitable attire for a woman doing out-of-doors labor. Lou and I have never worn it; we knew we ought — we meant to some day, but we never have. We disliked it, æsthetically; though I am bound to add that by reason of wearing the conventional dress, we have endured other ills much more to be contemned and held odious, even from an æsthetic point of view than “the Bloomer costume.”

But the inches I did cut off my gown rendered out-of-door movements practicable, and beginning moderately, I worked *every day* with cousin John and the boys, never once considering the weather,

for I knew that once on our farm we must go out, rain or shine.

I found everything hard, but nothing *impossible*.

Little Rob and I cut up half a dozen acres of corn, unassisted. I also helped husk the same, bound my bundles, and well, too. At first I was greatly discouraged over this same "binding," as all women are: for cousin said he couldn't sacrifice too largely to our experiment, and that he wouldn't have me in the husking unless I could bind my stalks as I went. I promised, but it tore and wore my hands cruelly, and then the bundles upon which I had spent so much time and care, often would fall in

pieces while I was carrying and setting them up.

I *couldn't* bind with stalks as men do, anyway — neither then, nor at any time afterwards. When I came into the field in the morning, I would spy about for any tall, supple grasses, grown up after the last cultivating, and, pulling them up, lay in a store for “bands.” But my weeds were not always to be found; and one day, when I was at quite a loss what to do, I espied two German women in the neighboring field, occupied like myself, and I climbed the fence and called upon them, as very properly I might, they being the later comers. They, I found, had availed themselves

of woman's proverbial wit; they showed me some balls of coarse twine.

"Go puy youself some palls of leetle rope, and not tear you shmall hands mit twisting weeds and marsh hay. It do take more time to twist him, than it do to earn de leetle rope."

I returned triumphant, and after that bound my stalks, woman-like, with "leetle rope."

After the first few days, I could work early and late. Cousin Janet said I should surely finish myself up now; and Louise was afraid I would, too. But day after day I appeared in my corn-field, for I was greatly interested in this corn-harvesting experiment, since

I felt sure that it was not only the grain we should chiefly raise, but that it was the grain that a woman could most easily cultivate from beginning to end, if she must do it with no money for hiring labor.

So I persisted. Of course I didn't fancy wet stalks, and all sorts of bugs, and mice nests, and perhaps a snake, in my lap, no more than any other woman would. Yet I persisted; and there were compensations.

The vigorous motions required to strip and break the ear from the husks, and the exercise of binding and carrying, expanded my chest in the same manner as the motions of the move-



Dolly finds nothing impossible.

ment cure, and marvelously strengthened shoulder and wrist. My cough ceased. The sunlight of the lovely, vaporous Indian summer weather, and the sweet air, proved at once a balm and a tonic for my irritated lungs and stomach, and together with the exercise, invigorated my appetite. I used to run down to dinner quite as hungry as the boys, and bark gleefully "like a wolf" in Janet's ears, to show her how ravenous I was, until at last the hired man—an old Scotchman—said one day to John, who was expostulating with me respecting my incessant labor:

"Hoot, mon! let the lass alone! gie her oatmeal pairrich for her breakfast

and let her wark; them as likes wark can wark their fill on that!"

So they can. Louise and I know that. A cup of strong, pure, well creamed coffee, with a dish of oatmeal mush dressed with cream and sifted sugar, has been our daily breakfast for years, though I own to always craving and needing a thoroughly first-class beefsteak for dinner.

The old Scotchman's hint has been a fortune to us in the matter of solid muscle, and perhaps in the way of healthy thought also.

While I was thus growing brown and strong out in the sunny fields, I was daily learning my business working alongside cousin John. I learned the easy

way, the "man's way," of holding the plow and turning a furrow, and it was a proud time for me when Rob and I were trusted to plow out the potatoes when potato harvest came. I "thanked my stars" every day then, as every day since, that I had had the energy and the sense thus to carry out our enterprise. I was taught how to make a proper stack of the cornstalks—one that would shed rain—and how to build a load—I *would* persist: if I slid off the load, as often I did, I would clamber back; and I picked apples day after day, until no possible height on the ladder could turn me giddy. I drove the mower to cut the seed clover; I could, in my scant skirts.

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I learned to milk fast and clean, how to feed and care for stock, and how to swing an ax and file a saw; and if I did sometimes quite wear out John and old Donald with my questions, and with being in the way, and with the general bother of a girl mixed up with the work, Lou and I don't know that we care. I would "tag round" all day at cousin's heels with his little boys, who thought it great fun to go out and work with Dolly, and who among them taught me almost as many things as their father did; and then at night I sat in the rocking-chair and questioned John about sheep, and wool, and lambs, and hay-making, and afterward thoughtfully com-

pared what he had said with the *Rural* and the *Agriculturist*.

Cousin paid me my wages by going over to our farm and plowing up every rod of it, save the door-yard and wood-lot. He protested against the nonsense of "fall plowing;" but I insisted, talking "cut-worms" and the magic harrows of the winter frosts. He protested still more loudly because I bargained for every load of barn-yard compost which the farmers for ten miles around would sell and deliver spread upon our plowed land — to "winter waste," they said; and the neighbors all called me a "headstrong girl" because after making the land so rich I would not "take a

wheat-crop off" when I "seeded it." But Lou and I knew a wheat-crop was an affair of money, men, and teams from beginning to end; besides, we meant to save the entire strength of the enriched soil for our future meadows.

Many a sly dig did I get about my stubbornness.

"Have ye bought yer team yet, Miss Shepherd?" Thus a friendly neighbor.

Miss Shepherd is saved the trouble of reply, by cousin John.

"A team? Dolly an't a-goin' to buy no team; she's a-goin' to work her farm with *idees*."

Well, why not? — if I can.

So, pursuant to John's theory of

“ideas,” I question and question, and read and read, until I have learned the routine of the main farm crops, the number of days’ work per acre of both men and horses, cost of seed, and probable average, and probable market value, of yield. I also learn the daily amount of food consumed by each of the meat-making animals, together with the usual market prices of the different meats, and also the best time and age to sell.

When winter came, I returned to my ancient employment. My school-keeping wages paid my debts to the farmers; and with the surplus I bought out cousin’s hennery entire — the fowls and the guano — together with a pretty pair of

Poland pigs. Lou had purchased grass and clover seed, and had learned to drive; and as I knew how to milk, and April was near at hand, we bought a load of hay, handsome horse, Pampas, and gentle cow, Maggie, gathered up all the old tools cousin had given us, even to an awl and a draw-shave, purchased some spades and a beautiful new double-shovel plow — ah, no woman ever looked more approvingly on her new piano than we did upon our trim little plow in its gay red paint and its array of shining shares — we wouldn't have had a drop of rain fall on it for dollars! — and went down home.

And here a blessing upon the gray

heads of cousin Janet and cousin John is surely in order; for a portion of everything in their house was sent with us, from a bag of flour and a ham down to a tiny sack of salt and the residue of my oatmeal, from a load of nursing fruit trees down to a bundle of currant brush and a peony root; and, last of all, a lovely little cat, "to purr and sit in your lap, and make it seem like home in the evening."

That was what little cousin Jamie said as he reached up and put it in my arms after we were seated in the wagon.

Well, it was a bare little house after we had done our very best with it, and had it not been our own we should not

have thought we could stay. We had spent all our money on the land, and for tools and "live stock," so that there was really nothing left for the house. Perhaps this fact—that we had bestowed so little thought upon the house itself, had really felt so little concern about it—will prove to those who search to see this thing, the unfeminizing influence of following a masculine pursuit. However, were we not wise, true, brave, strong? We must not, no more than man, put in peril the bread-and-butter item of the plan.

But we felt all that any woman could demand of us, that first evening. There was not one bright thing in the room

except the crackling fire, and Louise with her golden hair and crimson cheeks. Such a home-made home as it was! I had braided a great rug, and that turned out to be the only bit of carpet we had for four years. Our window-shades were of newspapers, scalloped, and adorned with much elaborate scissors-work. We had three chairs, antiquated specimens, that I had brought down from cousin's wood-house chamber, cushioned and draped with some of our old gown skirts, and the trouble we had, to be sure, with those chairs, because we could not step up on any one of them to reach things! We used a stand in place of table, for which Lou contrived a leaf—poor self-deprecating

Lou, who, I am sure, might have stood and faced the world alone as a carpenter—and we slept upon an old-fashioned bedstead which Janet had given us. We owned three plates and a platter, as many knives and forks, cups and saucers; John said if we had company Lou and I could wait, which we did. The rest of our in-door possessions consisted of some odd kettles, a score of shining new milk-pans, a couple of sweet new cedar pails, a broom, a small pile of books in blue and gold, a trunkful of magazines—unbound but precious—an etching of Evangeline, and a splendid engraving of Longfellow sitting in a rocking-chair, and Lou's watch: that, truly, was every-

thing we had to put into that great, rambling old house.

However, we both still think it was better to have bought the clover seed.

The first evening was a strange experience. I remember just how oppressive the silence became after everything was done, and we sat down. Finally, Lou cried, and I laughed. Then presently we felt how absurd it was to be like this in our own house; and we cheered ourselves with the pussy and the fire, and said we would subscribe for a newspaper. And pretty soon, all was going well.

In due time cousin John came again, and gang-plowed the fields we had de-

voted to clover. Then he lent us his team, and Lou and I harrowed and harrowed. Then we sowed our clover and timothy, our red-top and blue grass and orchard grass, all according to the proportion and measure sent us, because we wrote and asked for it, by the N. Y. *Tribune*. We followed the receipt so thoroughly that John was fain to swear at our wastefulness. There was required double the quantity which any farmer in that vicinity had ever sowed upon his land. But we bought and sowed it. I didn't believe, even then, that there was need for such spotted meadows as I had observed—the clover growing in distinct patches and tufts, the grasses coarse

sparse, and wiry; I wanted some fine, sweet grasses. I will say here that I was rewarded for my faith in liberal seeding; for owing to that, and to the plentiful winter dressing, and the fine seed-bed we made of all the fields, our pretty trefoil came up all over like wheat, or a lettuce-bed, and our grasses *are* fine, thick, and sweet, and the farmers, the big farmers of hundred-acre fields, came to look at our little meadows and marvel at our clover, and cut samples of our orchard grass to take away for show. Of course we did not enjoy these triumphs, these results of "working our farm with ideas" — oh, no!

Even the big hill whose barren sandy

top was everywhere visible, which everybody said could never "be seeded down," is covered to its very top-tip with tenderest grasses and sweetest clovers; and often of a summer morning we see Pampas standing there, high against the clear northern sky, serene with his satisfaction over his dewy breakfast — "a statue to our spunk," Lou says.

And then, waiting for May days and corn-planting, we began work in earnest. In our brief dresses, in which Louise said she felt "so spry," rejoicing in loose bands and in shoulder-straps and blouse waists to a degree that would have delighted Miss Phelps, we shouldered our axes and our dinner-pails, *a*

la lords of creation, and went over to our bit of forest to get up "the year's wood," after the manner of the model householder.

I will allow you just a moment in which to fancy us vainly attacking huge logs, and then tell you we were simply thinning out the young trees. It really was not a difficult task to fell them. Afterwards we constructed a couple of rude, strong saw-bucks, and sawing diligently, day after day, we at last had a supply for months piled neatly in the green recesses.

After that came fence-mending, yes, and fence-making, for we were obliged to have sixty rods of entirely new fence.

We found that our own woods had been thoroughly denuded of "rail timber," and further, that even in this comparatively new country, a board fence already had become cheaper than one of rails, when it came to buying materials outright.

This was the result of Lou's inquiries at the village lumber yards.

"And," added she, "the fences, even at these rates, will cost almost as much as the land did. Just think of it! Well, now, there is a country saw-mill three miles up north; of this fact a man would take advantage."

"And why not we?"

The next day, in our new, gay little wagon we set off over the hills. There

was a quizzical light gleaming in the black eyes of the proprietor of the mill as he came forward to listen to our inquiries; but it mattered little to us — we had become accustomed to quizzical lights. He soon found that we meant “cash down,” and we found that by buying logs and hiring them sawed we should compass a saving of fifteen dollars.

“And now, Dolly,” said Louise on the way home, “I shall draw those boards myself. Those mill-men look good-natured — they will load for me. You and I together can lift off the wagon-box, and I have studied out how to lengthen the reach with a false one. I can ride nicely on the reach going, and on the

boards coming back. Nothing shall be wanting on my part, Dolly."

It is not pertinent to the history of this experiment how people stared to see little Louise riding by upon a wagon-reach. She took care, wisely, to look very pretty, and I believe it was thought rather "cunning" than otherwise; she and her yellow-striped wagon and her spirited roan horse were all upon such a little scale; "and all of us sandy-complexioned," she laughingly said as she started.

I worried greatly for fear she would fall off "the reach," but by noon she was safely back with her little load of boards. Encouraged by her brave smile

I ventured to think we might unload.
And we did.

“No harder than dancing several hours, Dolly,” Lou said cheerily. “And saving our money serves much the same purpose as the music, don’t it?”

Next day ditto, and the next, and the next.

“There!” said the little teamster, as she surveyed the boards scientifically scattered up and down the lines of future fence. “There, Dolly, we have saved the twenty dollars with which becomingly to accept the inevitable—a woman *cannot* dig post-holes and set posts!”

No, indeed!

The post-setting accomplished, we bought our fence-nails, and with our hammers and saws went out to build fence. We built it, too, notwithstanding masculine wisdom assured us we could not. We lifted the boards by uniting strength, I held them against the post close to Lou's accurate red chalk marks — it is Lou who has the correct eye — and she drove the nails. During which we found that the fifteen dollars saved was the margin for straight edges, uniform width, freedom from bark, immunity from knot-holes, and the general superiority of art over nature, town over country.

We also took down and relaid the

entire roadside fence, not accomplishing all this, of course, without countless resting-spells; the fibre that endures, the power of giving blow and bearing strain, is of painfully slow growth. We did it, as everything else, little by little.

The fence-mending done, we attempted another bit of thrift. We harnessed Pampas to the little wagon, for which we ourselves had constructed a light extra box to place atop the other, and then we drove up and down our estate—Lou practicing in the art of standing to drive, the while—through the woods and through the grubby residue which John couldn't plow, cutting our wagon-roads as we went, often both

jumping out to roll aside a log, rolling and blocking, rolling and blocking until we had conquered, and thoroughly "picked up" the place, bringing back to the door load after load of sticks and limbs and chips for summer wood.

There were three acres of this unavailable residue. While we were loading, we often paused to contemplate it. It was covered by a growth of white oak grubs; old stumps and knotty logs had been rolled down upon it, and it had been made a dumping ground for stones and for the mountainous piles of brush from former clearings.

"Here Dolly dear, is our knitting work!" Lou said one day.



“Knitting-work.”

Just that it was for two years. When no other work pressed, we “logged.” That is, we cut down grubs — trimming up the tallest to mend fence with — and piled the brush, old and new, around the logs, dragging the stumps into piles of two and three by means of Pampas, and a big chain; many a summer night have we tended our big bonfires over there, with pussy-cat frisking about our steps; twice have we had the whole place on fire and the neighborhood out to save the fences and put out the flames — what we do not know and cannot do in the way of “whipping out” a fire is really not worth any woman’s while. In fact, our daily life those first years

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was so truly primitive, and seemed such a bit of delightful outlawry from the conventional house-life of our sex, that Louise often said:

“We might as well be gypsies, Dolly, and live in the hedge!”

Meantime, other things were happening. We had tried a bit of the newspaper gardening: Louise and I had agreed we would try almost everything. It was a proud day when Louise, with me standing by to see her, first set her little sturdy woman's foot on the spade and slowly drove it home and as slowly brought up and turned over a big slice of earth. She knocked it to pieces as it fell.

“That dirt is *ours*, Dolly,” she said gaily. I looked at it vaguely, yet somehow feeling very rich.

So we had a bit of garden ground made ready, while the farmers about us sat by their fires in the belief that it was yet winter; and, presently, underneath a thin coverlet of straw, and the light roof of some loose cornstalks, up and down the sunny south side of the selected garden site, we had lettuces and peas and onions growing greenly, right in the midst of snow-storms. It was a pretty sight, after a light April snow, to run up there and take a peep in and see them all smiling up at us with such a live, cheery, undaunted look, as

if to say, "We are *very* comfortable, thank you, and as busy as we can be!" It made *us* cheery. We were like two children. Every day we hovered about this first gardening, this premature bit of summer, which we had evoked as from fairy-land. It was such a wonderful thing to us, as wonderful as the telegraph, to ask a question of Nature — a question wrapped up in a tiny brown seed, or a brown bulb, or a little withered, wrinkled bean — and be answered thus.

But another development in our affairs was not so encouraging. Pampas, upon acquaintance, was proving to be an

extreme conservative, who preferred that things should run on in the old ruts. He had been born in the purple; and as soon as he learned that he had probably become involved for life in the problem of woman's independence, his discontent threatened us serious trouble. Having been accustomed to a town carriage-house he did not take kindly to our rustic accommodations, although his good breeding, while he supposed himself merely on a visit, led him to accept them courteously; but of late we had been wakened, and lain trembling to hear him pawing and knocking on the sides of his stable in the dead of night — *our* horse — what were *we* to do with him?

"I will whip him for that," Louise said at last.

He had never drawn any vehicle save a light phaeton, or worn any but the daintiest trappings, and he hated our harness, and never would accept the bits without a protest; and of late he had shown his contempt for our pretty wagon by a series of short runs back and forth whenever he was put in the thills; and now he was resorting to sudden jumps, and to standing straight upon his hind feet in the desperate struggle to free himself.

"I will whip him for this, too!" said Louise one day, after dismounting to go to his head and lead him on for the seventh

time, from the load of wood which he had vainly tried by rearing and plunging to overturn. I looked at his ugly mouth champing the bits so restively, and at his unloving eye, and I fancied little brief Louise whipping him! I should have laughed had I not been so fearful she would do as she said—that being a habit she has.

One day when he wouldn't "back," she kept her word.

She jumped down from the wagon, went to his head, led him out into an open space, told me to come along, and throwing off her sun-bonnet, took the whip.

"Now back, Pampas! back!"

Not a step. Nothing but that fierce champing

“Back, I say! back!” She tries to force him back with all her strength—and her white, firm arm and shoulder have strength. But Pampas champs and plants his feet, and then tries to make a little run at her, and I cry out. She crushes him back, the veins standing out on her little brown fists like cords.

She is white enough now: “Get into the wagon, Dolly,” she says, without looking round, “and pull on the lines!”

I clamber in, and while she tries again, I pull, and cry, “Back! back!” with all my weak voice. It is an excited feminine shriek, and it sounds as if I was afraid

and was about to break down and cry, when in reality I am as brave and as angry as Louise.

She tells him once more. Then she forces the bits back, and she raises the whip, and she brings it down upon his breast fiercely and fast, and cries, "Back, Pampas!" Pampas rears; the taint of mustang blood shows itself now; he raises her clear from the ground, but he can neither knock her down nor shake her off—oh! how ugly he looks.

The whip comes swift and fierce. "Back! back there! back!" And I am as angry as she. I don't care if we both do get killed, and I pull and she cries to him, and all at once he does

back — runs back swift and hard. She holds fast. “Brace yourself if you can!” and then we bring up against the fence, and I sit down suddenly, and then am thrown forward over on the dash-board. He plunges, but little Lou holds him there. She *can* hold him. Then, after a little, she allows him to come forward, a few steps at a time, breathing hard and stepping high. He stands and paws, and looks, oh, how furious!

Lou takes breath a moment. “‘This never’ll do!” she says, and tells me to get out. She springs in while I try to hold him as she did; he evidently thinks he can trample *me* down.

“Now, don’t be frightened!” she says



Pampas shows his mustang blood.

with a sudden sweet smile at me. "The harness is strong, and I can hold him; let go now!"

I try to let go, and he gives a plunge, nearly knocking me over, and shoots out at the open gate, just as Lou meant. Up the road they go, Lou bare-headed, her golden fleece of hair floating straight behind her. I can see her whipping him up the long hill. He plunges — I can see the long bounds of the wagon — kicks, breaks into a run again, and the next minute they are out of sight, and the Kromers all come out to the gate to look. I can hear them for a little while over on the other road, the wagon rattling and

bounding once or twice, and then there is nothing more to be heard.

They are gone an hour. I try to get dinner, but I cannot see, for tears. I let one of our plates fall and break. I let the meat burn. I wring my hands and walk the floor. At last I am just tying on my sun-bonnet to go and see what I can find, when suddenly I think I hear wheels. I run to the door. I did hear wheels. It is Louise, coming the other way. They have evidently been round the big square, of a thousand acres, more or less. Pampas is walking meekly. He is covered with sweat and foam—such a sorry-looking beast!

Lou sits on the seat, serene, but white and large-eyed.

She smiles to me as they pause in the gateway. She composedly backs him a little. Then they come on again a few steps, then she stops him. She backs him again.

“See! don’t he know his master?”

He looks so meek and sorry. I think he would like to lay his nose against my cheek, but she will not let me pet him, not ever so little.

How we congratulate ourselves! for the neighborhood has for the last fortnight plainly been of the opinion that “them two girls have no business with a horse!”

But the next morning, while we are at breakfast, we hear the old ringing hoof-blows upon the side of the barn.

Louise jumps up and takes down the whip, and I follow her. It is very dreadful to me that we two gentle, intelligent girls, cannot coax and win and govern a horse according to theory. Pampas starts as Lou unlatches the stable door. He turns his head. He sees her, sees the whip, and he—yes, he actually falls upon his knees.

Lou nods at him meaningly, lays down the whip, tells him to get up which he does, tells him to go to eating, which he does.

“There, old fellow!” she says, and

then it is her turn to tremble. She turns to the fresh air, leans against the stable door a moment, white and sick.

After this, for nearly a week, Pampas trembles when he hears her coming. Once or twice he has to be shown the whip at a time when his memory bids fair to fail him concerning the art of backing, but the seriousness of the trouble is over with; and at last I am permitted to pet him again.

Yes, it is very dreadful to me that we cannot coax and win and govern a horse according to theory. I cannot reconcile the fact with my cherished traditions, with my ideals of the horse—but it is a fact that we are disappointed in the

"noble creature." It is a fact that Lou does not love her horse. Perhaps it is because she does not respect him. She says he is not frank, or generous, or sunny, that he is selfish. He calls to her when he hears her step, for an ear of corn, but he fails to look glad, or turn his head lovingly at the touch of her hand; perhaps he is conscious that she disapproves of his wastefulness in eating his hay. To me he is kind in a certain lofty manner. For me he will bend his strong neck and patiently wait while I awkwardly pull his head-stall into position. For Lou he will not stoop that neck an inch. Once, when Lou came home sick, and I tremblingly took

my life in my hands and led him to pasture, he kindly waited—yes, waited intelligently—while I got all the bars down, and then carefully stepped over the pile, turned and held his head low for me to pull off the halter—then was off. With his master, it is his custom to paw and curvet while the first bar is being shoved, then, in a flying whirl, to alight, at great peril to the sun-bonneted head, on the other side where, still curvetting, he is held until the halter is slipped, when he is off and away; and standing in the back door, trembling for Lou's safety, I hear his heels swiftly beating the grassy hillside in the wild prairie gallop none of the neighbors,

horses ever indulge in, but I do not breathe until Lou comes in sight down the lane.

No, we cannot make a pet and companion of our horse. I am afraid of him — Lou is merely his master. She *is* his master. In the matter of Pampas she makes no concessions to her womanhood. He does not stand in his stable in winter-time until he is unmanageable. No matter how electric the air, each morning he is led out and exercised, and I stand at the pantry window with my heart in my mouth, while he flies in swift circles about the hooded little figure which urges him to still wilder evolutions. She never puts

off going to town because it is keen and frosty, and Pampas will be sure to "act bad." Trembling, but determined she shall not meet her fate alone, I prepare to go too, braving the penalty of a stiff neck for days to come, in my nervous anxiety lest a team came up behind us unawares, sending Pampas into the air like an Indian arrow, and off, often to be stopped only by reining him straight out of the road into a fence corner. The solicitous men of the team behind, stop, alight, come to our rescue, but Lou calmly puts aside all proffers of assistance, until it comes to be a recognized thing on the road, that one is to drive quietly on, no matter what trouble

“those girls” appear to be in. And then, when we start for home! ah, that moment when I sit with crowding heartbeats, while Lou, having untied our pawing, tossing steed, gets to my side, reins in hand, the best and quickest way she can. The men standing about offer to hold him, but she will have no one at his head—she will not accustom him to that. What “silver threads” I have, I owe, I think, to beholding Lou clambering about over on the thills, now to fasten up the check-rein which the tossing head has unloosed, now to recover the “lines” which he has jerked or whisked from her hand. I am never at rest after she sets forth. Once she

accompanied her horse in a mad leap across the railroad track, under the very nose of the rushing locomotive; once he whirled and threw her from the wagon, but she was picked up with the reins wound securely round her little fist, and drove home alone, "black and blue" with bruises, yet still master.

But she does not love Pampas — nor Pampas her.

By this time the money capital of the enterprise had become entirely exhausted, and we were left dependent upon the butter and eggs of our plan. We met the issue cheerfully. During our first week at cousin Janet's we had

found that these staples were not going to bring us any such prices as we had counted upon. We could only trust that there might be such a resource as making good the deficiency in prices by the production of larger quantities. We experimented with the feed of our hens — our fascinating hens — and at last we did succeed in bringing what Louise called “a perfect storm of eggs.”

Yes — our fascinating hens. For we were perfectly absorbed in our pursuit — each day, each simple busy day was an enthusiasm. To rise betimes, to have breakfast just ready when Lou came in from milking, and meantime to have skimmed the cream, and fed the hens

— why we put both heart and mind into it. The busy days were long with pleasure—the pleasure of successful toils. Perhaps, one must feel this way about any labor to make it a satisfying success. Even our hens were fascinating, as I said. They were the brightest, busiest, cheerfulest little bodies, complaisant individuals, interesting acquaintances, every one. I knew the peculiar crow, and cackle, and cluck of each member of my small army of happy stay-at-homes, whom the neighbors blessed and wondered at alternately. Mr. Kromer and Mr. Hooper sowed their great wheat fields close up on either side of our narrow strip of a farm, and went home and slept serenely,

and we ourselves neither picketed our garden nor stood guard over tomatoes and strawberries. After the wheat was harvested and drawn into the barn, Mr. Hooper came to say that we "might turn our hens in." Being thrifty, we were duly grateful. We should need to buy no more corn and "middlings." The wheat field would subsist them for weeks. The eggs would be "a clear gain."

So we went out and invited our virtuous and now-to-be-rewarded fowls, an easy matter since they generally formed into a long silent pattering procession at the tail of my gown whenever I appeared. Little and big, chattering as they went, they followed us up to the field, up and



A fashionable "train."

in — and also out and back. Thrice we went, and thrice we returned — we and our hens.

“They actually don’t know enough to forage!” said Lou, half vexed. “Did you ever hear of such hens?”

We were determined to avail ourselves of that wheat — it meant dollars and cents to us little farmers. We laid a plan, a real woman’s plan, and went to bed, to rise next morning before light. I went into the domicil of my wondering little family, and quietly placing my two hands on their plump unsuspecting sides, (I could walk up to any one of them in the broad day-light of out-of-doors and lift them in my hands, to be rewarded

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with a soft nestle-down and a little pert side look from a bright eye, both motions dainty as a canary's) I took them from the roost, and handed them, one by one, outside to Lou who slipped them into a covered bushel basket. When the basket was full we two thrifty farmers took it up by the ears, tugged it up to the wheat field, climbed the fence, lifted over our heavy, fluttering, frightened burden, and going quite over the hill, emptied them out into the soft, dewy dark. "They had had no breakfast," we reasoned, "and of course would pick up the wheat; their voices would call the rest; once wonted and unfed elsewhere, they would take possession, and with the money

saved we would buy a handsome blanket for Pampas."

Alas, and alas! Stumbling back in the dark, before we reached the fence, sped past us on a winged run, screaming at the top of their voices, our hens; and there they stood at the door of their house on our arrival, a frightened huddling heap, waiting to be let in—"hopelessly well fed," Lou said.

They *were* well-fed—we fed them "with ideas"—that is, we fed them chemically—but the fine, chopped green vegetables, now lettuce, now cabbage, now onions, now fruit, the coarse meats bought at market, the varied grains, with constant "middlings" stirred up with hot

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water — now with a dust of cayenne pepper, now of salt, now of sulphur, the constant supply of plaster and bones, and the constant supply of fresh water, brought us the desired result — eggs the year round, a supply in winter as well as in summer. To be sure we earned them, but we had not committed the fatal mistake of supposing we should get things on our farm *without* earning them. From first to last we have despised that man's way of setting down and making a calculation of the interest on the money invested in the farm and the tools, and the stock, and the wages of himself and his team per day, and then, after adding up the yield of his

farm, declaring that one was making nothing, but really running behind. As if a happy daily life were not the very best one could get out of money and labor, any way!

Our butter experience was not quite so encouraging. Knowing it costs no more to keep the good cow than the poor one, we had paid an extra price and had secured one of extra excellence, upon whom our meal and "middlings" were not wasted: gentle Maggie, with her little Maggie of still more precious blood in the stall adjoining. Louise lavished upon her all the affection that by right of romance should have gone

to Pampas; and Maggie returned it with all that intelligence and attachment Pampas did not show — just as dogs have disappointed us while cats *never* have.

She was all that a short-horned, yellow-skinned, slender-footed, black-nosed little cow can be; and we never blamed *her* because our butter brought us only twenty-five, twenty, eighteen, fifteen, twelve and a half cents per pound; such is the descending scale from March to June.

We make, I have been persuaded, the veritable “gilt-edged” butter of the Boston and Philadelphia markets. It is sweet, fragrant, sparkling, golden-tinted, daintily salted, and daintily put up; but

even from the most fastidious private buyers we never have received above thirty cents per pound, and during the greater portion of the summer have sold it for fifteen cents, and twelve cents, the same price which Mrs. Kromer receives for her soft, lardy-looking rolls; perhaps *that* is the most aggravating part of it! The finer grades of butter, it seems, are not appreciated by the western citizen and his family. Making inquiries in Detroit and Chicago, we learn there is no special trade in these extra grades, and that, if offered, they could not be placed at anything like eastern prices.

And while eastern families are accustomed to pay from thirty to forty

cents per dozen for eggs, we have never, even in winter, secured over twenty-five cents for the fresh-laid, while in the plenteous summer time we sell for ten cents.

In due time also we found that our black-cap raspberries would really go for ten cents per quart, and the bulk of our strawberries for the same. We abandoned forever the "small fruits" item of our plan, so far as income was concerned. We have our Wilson and Jocunda beds, where, with many a backache and many a dizzy headache, with hotly glowing brow and scorched hands — since strawberries to be spicy and sweet must be picked dry in the mid-

day sunshine — we grow those great, rich-hearted scarlet and crimson berries, berries which are chronicled as marvels by grateful editors, berries that one must need slice for the table; but they are never for sale, thank you! One must pay for every strawberry one raises its full money's worth in labor, nor will strawberries ever be cheaper.

The raspberries are more satisfactory, the needed labor coming only at regular intervals. Under our systematic treatment, on the same plantations they yield, year after year, bountifully and uniformly, and we have them for plentiful use the year round, as farmers have apples — and how those farmers' wives with nothing

but apples envy us — and we can them wholesale, picking them by the pailful, cooking them in a great boiler, dipping them with a big dipper into great stone jars holding three or four gallons, and sealing up with the sweet and winey crimson lusciousness, bird songs and dewy mornings, the gold-and-rose silences of early, lovely August dawns, and all the pretty pictures of the little upland plantation with its tall purple canes, each trellised group of three bending greenly from its stout bands, black with ripe fruit, starred here and there with the little white hearts where the birds have been breakfasting — the birds that know they are welcome and often pick in the same

row with me, conscious that I am aware it is they who keep the plantation free from bug, fly and worm, so free that we do not even know what species of creatures harm raspberry canes.

So, there were some disappointments, yet on the whole an encouraging daily success. We doubtless should have done better had our land lain near the large thickly-settled eastern towns, instead of west. But, despite all short comings in the way of market prices, we two farmers did, by cheerfully ignoring several of the items mentioned by the Labor Commission as among the necessities of the ordinary family, week by week, make

both ends meet — perhaps because we sternly balanced accounts every week, nay, every day.

For our very own personal needs, the little Arcadian income would really have sufficed; but there always came up some thing to be purchased which we had not made account of: the pound of nails, the pane of glass, a horseshoe to be set, a bit of repair upon wagon or tools, the road tax, the pleasant little expenses for company. It was, indeed, quite a close affair those first years. Even in the early weeks we dismissed the idea of smoked ham and dainty sausage, and devoted “Pin-cushion” and “Roly-poly” to the

payment of taxes and the discharge of debt for hired labor.

Ah, Roly-poly—pink-nosed and fat Roly-poly of the twinkling legs, predecessor of a long line of Roly-polys, each a pet in his own time and place—shall we ever forget that soft dark spring midnight when we were suddenly wakened, how or by what we knew not! At last I became conscious of a strange little noise outside, under the window.

“Hark!” said Lou, at the same instant, sitting up.

I harked. After due waiting, another little scrambling sound, together with a low happy grunt.

Lou groaned.

“Those pigs are out, Dolly.”

Yes, unmistakably.

“Quietly, now,” I said, as when all was ready we unclosed the door and issued forth — each bearing a pan of sour milk, cream and all.

I was proud of my forethought in that little matter. Lou, who would have taken a lasso and walked fearlessly into a herd of Pampas’ wild relatives, was helpless here. She was content to do my bidding meekly.

“Piggy, piggy!” I called cheerfully.
“Come, piggy!”

Guilty piggy! He jumped, barked like a little dog, and I dimly saw and distinctly heard him scampering around



A Midnight Adventure.

the corner of the house. But I was only too glad to discern thus that only one was taking an outing. Carefully bearing my pan of milk, I went swiftly around the other corner, and met him at the back door. Off he ran, but I ignored him. I calmly set my pan down by the wood-pile, and turned my back. Presently, I heard the little waddling form approaching, nose to the ground, uttering quick, delighted little grunts. A moment more, and the naughty pink nose was in the milk, the naughty fore-paw right in the middle of my bright new milk pan. Softly I turned. Softly, at a signal, came Lou, pouring in her contribution to this feast *al fresco*.

Thus reassured, Piggy forgot fear and put in both fore-paws; it was then I softly bent and seized him, grasping his fat little body with both hands—but oh, the muscle of even a small pig, the weight of the solid little self! he struggled up, down, outward, backward, kicked, squealed as if in mortal pain; but I was already bearing him onward, and Lou, behind me, stumbling over the pan of milk reached helpfully and seized—not the kicking little pig, but my wrist, and bearing that on high, almost forcing me to let go the pig, squeezing it unmercifully, determined to *not* lose her hold, kick as he might, I both laughing and panting to the extent I could

not speak to expostulate or explain, we reached the pen and tossed Master Roly-poly over in beside his sleeping mate. Then we restored the lifted door, under which he had squeezed through, to its place, and went back to the house, all in the vague dark — poor Lou so mortified and vexed at the way she had helped, that she would not speak to me until the middle of the next forenoon.

Well, to go back a little, it was a busy busy spring; a home has to be begun in so many directions at once — meadow, field, garden, orchard, flowers, and shubbery. Ah, that setting of trees! With us “arbor day” stretched through

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weeks; what with pear, apple, peach, and cherry, evergreen, lilac, rose, and locust, to say nothing of the vines and canes. I confess to hours when Lou and I toiled side by side in silence, digging those holes. Nature is no gallant. She has inexorable laws which woman, in common with man, must confront. The spade in delicate hands must needs be driven as deep as the horniest palm can thrust it. Protect your white hands as you will, if you labor out-of-doors there will come upon them brownness, redness, and freckle; there will be cracks, torn flesh, "slivers," what not, and upon your soft, pink palms, callous, blister, and soreness unendurable; a brown, enlarged,

useful, and strong hand will be one of the penalties of your independence. Also, my graceful sisters, who shall essay independence in this field, your slender shoulders will broaden, you will affect a roomy bodice, and your arms will lose their tapering contours. As compensation, you will come into possession of an exquisite perception of the purity of atmospheres, a comfortable disregard of changes in the weather, an appetite for fruits and vegetables and nourishing steaks, and an indifference to injurious seasonings and flavorings — you can walk where you will, lift what you will, carry for long distances, and confidently project fresh undertakings.

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Our tree-setting and early gardening well out of the way, came our first farming proper — corn planting. In consideration of certain “suits” made for his little boys, cousin John sent over his horses, plow, and old Donald. Him we coaxed to sit under a budding tree, and ourselves took possession of the horses and plow. I had been longing to show Lou what I could do; and, truly at cousin John’s I had not thought plowing so very terrible. But I found our stony, hilly field somewhat different from his soft, level garden land. To my surprise and hers, instead of walking quietly after my horses along my straight, loamy furrow, as I had meant

and had led her to expect, Lou beheld me pulled this way, then that, dragged over clods, forced into long strides, the plow now lying upon its side, now leaping along the surface, until the trained team turned their heads in mute inquiry.

We *can* plow, as I said, but do not think it advisable. Dozens of farmers, especially those young farmers who are bound to succeed, do not scorn to do something outside, and by a job of carpentering, mason-work, threshing-machine, or the like, furnish themselves with many comforts otherwise unattainable. So I trust that we are none the less legitimately farmers because by a bit of dressmaking, or fine sewing, we hire our

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plowing and mowing, and whatever other work we please.

We dragged and marked the four acres without assistance. Then we proceeded with another item of "that newspaper foolery," which, according to John, no farmer can afford. We had so often been assured that our land wouldn't grow corn, we didn't know but it might be so, and thought it well to assist the soil to the extent of our means. With our determined and persistent hoes, we composted the guano of the hennery with plaster, until it was fine, dry, and inodorous.

Such a task as that was!

Lou would stop and lean her forehead,

wet and red, upon her hoe-handle, and utter a bit of the current but kindly neighborhood sarcasm.

“‘*Two girls!*’ don’t you think so, Dolly?”

Dolly did think so, sometimes.

Then, with a pail in one hand, and a wooden spoon in the other, we each went over the field and deposited a modicum of this home-made fertilizer wherever a hill of corn was to grow.

Such preliminary work was, of course, very tedious. But it made a difference, we think, if the opinions concerning the state of the soil were correct, of at least forty bushels per acre; for the barren mullen field yielded us, upon an average,

ninety bushels to the acre. And let me say again that in most instances, as in this, it has paid us to "*work our farm with ideas.*" Our superior melons and turnips, savoys and strawberries, as well as our corn crops, are the result of special work upon special plans, assisted by special fertilizers; in no instance the costly ones of commerce, but home-made and carefully adapted by means of many experiments.

The fragrant May days passed. Our corn shot up its delicate pointed blades, our currant and berry settings puffed and ruffled themselves from top to toe with their little frilled leaves of exquisite green, and each morning there

was some miraculous development at the garden beds. It was a pretty sight of a mid-May morning: our "variegated foliage" beets, peas, finger high, onion beds, rank upon rank of green lances, lettuces fit for salad and mayonnaise, tomatoes needing trellis, potatoes high, thick and green, all freshly hoed and sparkling with dew. Ah, it is worth while to make garden! Not that ours has ever been particularly early, not that we could ever compete with a dozen Irish women near us, who raise "truck" for the markets. Oh, no! every season one can buy cucumbers when our vines are just bestarring themselves with their little yellow blossoms; and the groceries

are gay with red, ripe tomatoes when ours are only "beginning to turn," and so on; and we have quite our share of hand-to-hand fight with cut-worm, potato bug, striped-bug, ants, the onion fly and frost, and drought; but still we have always had both plenty and perfection in the end, and a world of simple pleasures by the way.

A little later came "cultivating corn" and this we found to our relief to be entirely practicable, although Pampas did his best to render cousin John's instructions of none effect. Nothing could induce him, that first season, to cross the field at less than his road pace, his naughty, handsome head held aloft, every

few moments breaking into a trot. After experimenting with him during one forenoon, we took him down to the stable, and I donned my long dress and went up to Mr. Kromer's. There I succeeded in lending him to take Mr. Kromer a journey, and in borrowing in return steady old Jane, who would demurely walk up and down the rows with me at my own leisurely pace.

We are kept thus busy with hoe and cultivator all the summer long. We spend few daylight hours in the house—the house is still a secondary matter—and look on to a snug winter in-doors with a zest indescribable. The autumn months come on apace, bringing

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still harder work and greater hurry. We cut up our corn, husk it, build a homely crib of poles, draw our stalks and stack them, thus really mastering the corn-crop—dig our potatoes, store our vegetables, and chatter rejoicingly like two squirrels as we heap up our winter cheer.

As the long, cold winter finally closes us in, we look cheerily from our windows out upon the world. Of course some strange, abnormal labors fall to our lot; there are paths to be shoveled through the snow, Pampas and the Maggies to be daily led forth to water, stables to be kept in wholesome order. But we do it, therefore others can.

The in-door coseyness, the sense of independence, fully reward us for it all. There is no enjoyment quite like that which quietly comes as the lot of thrift and industry. We have succeeded in avoiding all debt save that which in due time the well-fattened Polands cancel. Maggie, feeding through the fall upon our golden pumpkins, enables us, with her beautiful butter, to fill the winter flour barrel; and a surplus of potatoes purchases a store of groceries. Eggs, week by week, supply "items." A day's work — O, such a lovely day's work — of picking apples "upon shares" in the Kromer orchards has filled the tiny apple bin. During the brief leisures, various

pieces of sewing provide hay for Pampas. Spring finds us not in debt, and more hopeful than ever of "our plan."

Year after year we live on after this fashion, tugging away at great labors and knowing few leisures, but kept cheery by the thought that we have already lived so comfortably so long, cooing away to ourselves we are not in debt, that our plan bids fair of success, until we begin to hear, on this hand and on that:

"Why, how prosperous those girl farmers are! Did you ever see the like?"

Then we pause, and look about us, and find it *is* so. The time has come. We ourselves see what a green, grassy

leafy nest the once despised little farm is, with its gardens and its fruit yards, its rosy clover meadows, and its rich upland pastures.

We frankly confess to all the world that we have not proved equal to the much "mixed farming," to the raising of general crops, to the personal tillage of plow lands. We, however, have been at disadvantage, physically. We possess but the minimum muscular strength of woman; the limits close around about us nearly. The tall, long-limbed, and large-framed woman, may be far more grandly independent. Still, we doubt whether she makes much more money than we, in our circumscribed, special ways.

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However, we can assure those who prefer to work, rather than "manage," that years before our experiment there were women, here and there, who were succeeding in "mixed farming." There were also other women who were able to profitably direct large agricultural operations. But it is not wisdom to point to brilliant successes; the average woman may well be more interested in the other average woman, who simply "makes a good living" off her land.

For example, while we were attempting our plan, one brave New Hampshire woman, for many years had had the entire care of an hundred-acre farm. She had been previously a sewing-girl,

giving up her employment on account of a cancerous trouble. She began gradually, assisting her father; but for twenty years she has had the farm in her own hands, having perfectly recovered her health.

This woman farmer does *all the work that any man farmer does*, has *no* help except as she "changes work" with her neighbors, as men in similar cases do. She plows all day, holding the plow, while a boy drives, plowing an acre of rough land per day, which in her vicinity is considered a good day's work. She cuts twelve tons of hay annually — mows, cures, loads and stores it away herself, exchanging work with her neighbors for

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extra help, even as a man would. She harrows, plants, hoes and reaps. In 1879, she raised thirty bushels of potatoes, doing *all* the work from first to last. She keeps three cows, last year marketing over two hundred pounds of butter. Last autumn she picked about two hundred and fifty bushels of apples. She draws her own wood, sometimes cutting it, and always loading and unloading, managing her ox team and her sled with the skill of a crack teamster. She also does all her housework, at present living quite alone. Her house is tidy, her buildings well kept, and everything has the look of being in the hands of a thrifty farmer. She enjoys her work, is independent in

her operations, asking no man's advice. She feels no need of advice.

We have not done all this; still, substantially, we have been "true to the early dream." The "golden foot of the sheep" is at last on our once barren hill-tops. Durham Maggie and Maggie II. and Maggie III. and Jersey Daisy feed luxuriously upon the deep, sweet grasses, and the honeyed clover-blossoms, while the cream-rising and the money-making go on together in the cool, shadowy milk-room day by day. The butter shipped in tubs, the choice mutton sheep, the fleeces in a load, are not representative of a ruinous and aggravating amount of either hired or personal labor, and give

us our money in that profitable shape, "the lump," and we have built a barn, "a love of a barn"—the talk of the neighborhood, since it is a genuine girl's barn, all stairs and doors, "an *adorable* barn," in fact; yet we have found each of the fourteen doors handy, as our Maggies are not imprisoned in stanchions but each has her own cosey room with its separate outer entrance—there are no ugly passage-ways in which to turn and "lock horns."

We think we have been wise. Even the "mixed" farmer and strong plow-woman of whom I have told you, and of whom much more might be profitably told, is gradually abandoning her field

crops for the dairy and for stock raising. We think that the care of small flocks and herds is an easy, gentle, and womanly occupation. We like their friendship and their company, and I dare say spend much unnecessary time with them. Lou carries her neatness and love of order into their quarters, and the sheep-cote and the barn are always pleasant places to visit. I often tell her that the sheds, so clean and warm and strawy, are as inviting as the house, and that I don't see why, for hundreds of overworked women, the Arcadian time of shepherdesses might not profitably come again.

"I know it, Dolly," answers Louise

earnestly. "I too, have thought of it so much. And now that men are coming more and more to share their occupations with us, I do wish that some of those women who are so tired and restless and discouraged, and haven't brains enough to become doctors and lawyers or business women of any kind, and yet need money just as badly, could see what a pleasant way of living this is. I wish we could tell them in some way, Dolly, just how we do. *We* raise nearly everything we consume you know, except wheat—that is we raise the means to buy what we don't raise. It would be such a relief, such a restoration to health and youth even, to rise in the morning

their own mistresses. This unspoken yet ever-uttered "by your leave," is *so* wearing. O, I do wish you *could* tell them Dolly!"

And Lou's wish is the *raison d'être* of my story.

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